retailers as their customers, subject to the restrictions on imports and retail trading.

Transport Corridor Linking Mumbai with Southern Russian Port

32. SHRI KARNENDU BHATTACHARJEE: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that India is planning to establish a transport corridor linking Mumbai with the Southern Russian port of Astrakhan to boost bilateral trade with Russia;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether any Memorandum of Understandings has been signed between the two countries in this regard and if not, the reason therefor; and

(d) whether the approval of various countries through which the corridor would pass has been sought and obtained?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) and (b) The Government of Russian Federation have proposed an international Agreement on transit along the 'North-South' Corridor to facilitate transportation via Iran and the Caspian Sea to the Russian Federation.

(c) and (d) The draft agreement was discussed in a meeting held in Moscow on 4-5 July, 2000 where representatives of the Russian Federation, Iran, Oman and India were present. Further discussions between the concerned countries will be necessary before a final decision can be taken.

Funtioning of the Patent Office

33. SHRI KARNENDU BHATTACHARJEE: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the news-item "The Patent Logjam" appearing in the 'Economic Times' dated 19th June, 2000;

(b) if so, the reaction of Government thereto; and

(c) what steps are proposed to be taken to address the various problems and bottlenecks mentioned in the news-item relating to the functioning of the Patent Office of Government?